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The White House Confirms Identity of the Mirage Mercenary Working for the GNA

⌚ June 26, 2019 ⌚ [Libya \(/process.php?d=pN896LbywKQTWhEN07xSmkczVGvMR5DxEVmV74m1sjF8oQ%3D%3D&b=1\)](#)

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that an American citizen, Jamie Sponaugle, accused of working as a mercenary pilot in Libya has been released after a six-week detention by the Libyan National Army (LNA), according to official sources.

[LIBYA, 26 June 2019] – The newspaper revealed that Jamie Sponaugle, a 31-year-old man from Florida, accused of being hired as a mercenary to fight for the Government of National Accord (GNA), was piloting a Mirage F1 on May 7 near Gharyan, south of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, when his warplane was shot down.

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

He turned out to be an American national contrary to what he claimed in the early moments of his captivity that he was Portuguese. His whereabouts have not been known since that day.

The LNA has publicly accused the man that the US media platform now identifies as Jamie Sponaugle who worked as a mercenary on a French-made fighter jet without informing his country's authorities, and was detained after conducting bombing raids against LNA forces in an area located in northern Gharyan.



Jamie Sponaugle, left, as a pilot on commercial flights in the United States.

The newspaper also revealed that it had withheld publication of Sponaugle's detention at the request of U.S. officials who were working to secure his release.

The Washington Post reported that the apparent involvement of an American pilot in an ongoing battle for Tripoli between the forces aligned with the GNA and the LNA, illustrates the complexity of a long-simmering conflict that has emerged as "a major global proxy war involving illicit arms and dueling accusations of mercenary use."

"It also draws attention to the shifting U.S. policy on Libya. While senior Trump administration officials have devoted limited time to Libya, the president appeared to upend years of steady support for the Tripoli-based GNA in April when he publicly praised Khalifa Haftar," said Missy Ryan and Josh Dawsey who contributed to the article.

White House official and President Trump's envoy for hostage affairs, Robert O'Brien, said in a phone interview with the newspaper, "We are always pleased to see Americans held captive overseas returned home to their friends and family. We appreciate his captors' decision to release him. We also thank the kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its role in resolving this case."



President Trump's envoy for hostage affairs, Robert O'Brien

The newspaper noted that it was informed by unnamed officials that Jamie Sponaugle was going to be flown from Benghazi to Saudi Arabia.

They confirmed that his last post as an active duty pilot was aerospace technician, and his last duty station was at an airbase in Tampa, on the west coast of Florida on Tampa Bay.

"In images released by the LNA shortly after the incident, Sponaugle is seen bloodied and receiving medical treatment from LNA forces after his aircraft went down. Video that appeared on social media showed him identifying himself as a Portuguese national named Jimmy Rees and saying he was in Libya under a civilian contract focused on destroying bridges and roads," the report continued.



In a video footage posted on Facebook that went viral, the man, who turned out to be an American, said he had worked with the Government of National Accord through a Libyan intermediary named al-Hadi. The American newspaper said that senior GNA officials who are trying to "drum up American support for their government, have denied that the GNA

uses foreign pilots."

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In an interview on France 24 on the day of the shooting down of the mercenary pilot's Mirage F1, Fayed Sarraj denied that they had any mercenaries, saying that these reports were just fabrications made by the media office of Operation Dignity.

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Al Marsad has previously published documents unveiling the identity of the Libyan intermediary contact, Colonel al-Hadi Makhlof, Director of the Mirage Aircraft Department at the Misrata Academy of Aerospace Sciences. Al Marsad also documented a letter sent by the academy to the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) in Tripoli requesting remittances for

the mercenary team working there. To view the documents, [click here](#)

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The report noted that it is not clear "whether Sponaugle would have violated U.S. law by working for or fighting in Libya. Many countries, including the United States, employ foreign security contractors, who can play a variety of roles and are sometimes armed".

The newspaper quoted a Western official familiar with the situation in Libya that the foreign trainers had long worked at the Academy of Aerospace Sciences in Misrata, Libya.

Spokesman for the LNA said following Sponaugle's capture that he was being treated humanely and in accordance with international law.

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